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ABSTRACT

This brochure describes activities of the three bureaus of the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF). The Children's Bureau of ACYF helps state, local, public and private agencies, and associations of agencies develop programs to assist families with problems which affect their children. Activities of the Children's Bureau focus on (1) finding permanent homes for children in the foster care system; (2) helping families deal with the problems of child abuse and neglect; (3) improving state and local child welfare services; and (4) strengthening troubled families and helping them stay together. The Head Start Bureau administers Project Head Start at the national level. The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) implements activities designed to strengthen families and meet the needs of at-risk youth. In addition, the FYSB administers the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act as reauthorized under P.L. 98-473, Sections 650-657. The Bureau's family activities aim to stimulate private sector response in developing innovative family support systems and increase public awareness by providing information on techniques of positive family functioning. The FYSB also develops areas of research, demonstration, and evaluation, and recommends actions to address critical problems, increase public awareness, and maximize utilization of project outcomes. (RH)

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Serving the Nation's Children and Families

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Office of Human Development Services
Administration for Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau

Serving the Nation's Children and Families

ACYF

Administration for Children, Youth and Families

Serving the Nation's Children and Families

At one time or another, most families in this country will need information, services or other forms of assistance in meeting the needs of their children.

The Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) is the agency within the Federal Government which has the responsibility for serving children and families. The agency provides information and other assistance to parents, administers national programs for children and youth, works with States and local communities to develop services which support and strengthen family life, and seeks out joint ventures with the private sector to enhance the lives of children and their families.

The concerns of ACYF extend to all children from birth throughout adolescence, with particular emphasis on children who have special needs. Many of the programs administered by the agency focus on children from low-income families; children and youth in need of foster care, adoption or other child welfare services; handicapped preschool children; abused and neglected children; runaway and homeless youth; and children from American Indian and migrant families.

The Administration for Children, Youth and Families is an agency of the Office of Human Development Services, in the Department of Health and Human Services. The agency was formed in 1969 when the Children's Bureau, created by Congress in 1912, was combined with the Head Start program for preschool children from low-income families to become the Office of Child Development. In 1977, the agency was expanded to include the child welfare services program, the Title IV-B (Social Security Act) child welfare services training program, and youth programs and was renamed the Administration for Children, Youth and Families. ACYF is administered by a Commissioner who is appointed by the President of the United States.

There are three major bureaus within ACYF which administer the programs serving children, youth and families: The Children's Bureau, the Head Start Bureau, and the Family and Youth Services Bureau. One other major unit in the agency, the Office of Planning and Management, has the responsibility for providing administrative and management services to the central office and the ten regional offices in support of the programs administered by the agency.

The Children's Bureau

Since its establishment in 1912, the Children's Bureau of ACYF has worked to improve the lives of children and families. In the past it has addressed such issues as child labor, maternal and child health, and juvenile delinquency. Today, the Children's Bureau helps State, local, public and private agencies, and associations of agencies to develop programs to assist families with problems which affect the growth, development and well-being of their children. Activities are focused on:

(1) finding permanent homes for children in the foster care system;

(2) helping families deal with the problems of child abuse and neglect;

(3) improving State and local child welfare services; and

(4) strengthening troubled families and helping them stay together.

Finding Permanent Homes for Children in the Foster Care System.

The Adoption Opportunities program is designed to eliminate barriers to adoption for children with special needs. The program is based on the belief that all children are adoptable, that children grow better in families, and that there is a family somewhere for each waiting child. Through grants to public and private adoption agencies and organizations, the Adoption Opportunities program has supported activities of minority organizations and other groups to address minority issues in adoption. It has demonstrated ways to share home studies across jurisdictions and developed a manual for placement agencies on preparing parents for adoption. The program also suggests ways the corporate and business sectors can promote the adoption of children with special needs and provides seed money to adoptive parent groups to work with social agencies to identify and use supportive resources. It has developed and published a Model Act for the adoption of children with special needs. The program developed curricula to train adoption workers, agencies and adoptive parents to work as a team in preparing prospective adoptive families. It has helped fund a National Adoption Exchange and has developed and distributed public service announcements to recruit foster and adoptive parents.

In addition, the Adoption Opportunities program has supported the departmental initiative on special needs adoption. This initiative is designed to heighten public awareness and increase State participation in the Federal Adoption Assistance program provided under Title IV-E (Social Security Act).

For two years, Human Development Services has led a national effort on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services to promote activities which will assist children with special needs to move out of foster care and into adoptive homes. Special needs children are school age, siblings, emotionally, physically or mentally handicapped, or minority children.

The Assistant Secretary, working with states and local communities, is encouraging the increased involvement of public and private agencies,

voluntary organizations, adoptive parent groups, the media and corporate leaders. Cooperative efforts are directed toward:

(1) increasing public awareness of special needs children in foster homes, group homes and institutions;

(2) recruiting adoptive families, including minority parents;

(3) improving training for adoption workers;

(4) reviewing and improving state adoption laws and practices;

(5) addressing national issues such as adoptions across state lines; and

(6) opening avenues of additional support for meeting the needs of waiting children.

Recent studies indicate that more than 54,000 special needs children in foster care are legally free for adoption. Of this number, 18,000 are already in adoptive placement; 36,000 are waiting for a home. For thousands more, adoption would be the plan of choice, but parental rights have not been terminated. There are about 269,000 children in foster care nationwide (down from about 502,000 in 1977). A large number are special needs children.

Many people interested in adopting may not know about the special needs children who need a loving, lifetime home. Some may not feel that they are qualified to adopt a child. These days, however, single men and women, older couples, couples with children and foster parents are adopting children with special needs.

Although the Children's Bureau has long worked with states on adoption, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272), permits, for the first tme, federal reimbursement under Title IV-E to states for adoption subsidies made to special needs children eligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). In FY 1982, 17 states served 3,826 children (monthly average) using federal adoption assistance. In FY 1983, 42 states and the District of Columbia served 6,230 children; 47 states and the District of Columbia have estimated that they will serve 10,500 children in FY 1984 and 13,500 in FY 1985.

Helping Families Deal With the Problem of Child Abuse and Neglect.

Each year, an estimated one million children and youth are reported to be victims of child abuse and neglect. To deal with this serious national problem, the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN) was established by Congress in 1974 and set up within the Children's Bureau. The Center serves as the focal point for a national effort to identify, prevent and treat child abuse and neglect.

The center works with State and local social service agencies, child protective agencies, a wide range of professional groups, and the private sector to help improve child abuse and neglect services and awareness. Because child abuse and neglect are often the result of severe strains within families, the National Center advocates a helping approach to the problem. It urges agencies to work to rehabilitate families, rather than

to punish parents, and to make every effort to help families stay together. However, it is acknowledged that legal remedies are, at times, necessary to protect children.

The Center supports research, demonstration and services improvement projects and programs conducted by States, public or nonprofit organizations or agencies. It also supports projects which address specific issues in the areas of prevention, protection, and treatment. These issues include the use of remedial preventive projects such as building capacity and resources in minority communities, perinatal prevention for adolescent parents, and self help programs. Other projects support protection for disabled infants, conduct research in the area of emotional maltreatment, and examine the role of the elderly and retired persons in the treatment of child abuse and neglect.

The Center operates a National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect research and programs information. The Clearinghouse has a computerized data base which is a national resource for service providers including state, local and national public and private officials and groups, members of Congress, researchers and concerned members of the general public. It also provides such end products as bibliographies, custom searches, compilations of resource materials, directories, annual reviews and indepth analyses of such materials.

The Center conducts periodic national conferences on child abuse and neglect and assists states in strengthening and improving their laws which relate to child abuse and neglect.

Finally, the Center provides grants to the States to assist them in developing, strengthening and carrying out child abuse and neglect prevention and treatment programs. These funds support specific developmental or start-up activities. Many of these programs continue to receive funds from the State after the initial federal support has ended.

Improving State and Local Child Welfare Services.

The Bureau carries out its mission through grants to the States for child welfare services and for foster care maintenance and adoption

assistance; demonstration projects that serve as models for State and local programs; research and evaluation projects which generate information leading to program improvements; training and technology transfer projects to help State and community agencies; and the publication of information materials for professionals and the general public.

The Children's Bureau administers the Foster Care, Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Services programs authorized by Titles, IV-E and IV-B of the Social Security Act. The Title IV-E Foster Care maintenance payments program provides federal matching funds to States for foster care maintenance payments made on behalf of those children in foster care who are eligible for assistance under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. The Foster Care program also encourages States to take action on behalf of children inappropriately placed in foster care, and to reduce the amount of time children spend in foster care through the provision of preventive reunification services and through the application of procedural safeguards.

The Title IV-E Adoption Assistance program provides States with federal matching funds for adoption subsidies for the care of eligible children with special needs (e.g. children with mental, physical or emotional handicaps, children who are members of a sibling or minority group, or children who are of school age). Adoptive families enter into an adoption assistance agreement with the State agency which specifies the amount of payment and other services, including Medicaid, to be provided. The agreement remains in effect if the family moves from one State to another. Federal matching funds are available under Title IV-E for the cost of administration of the foster care and adoption assistance programs and training of personnel employed or preparing for employment in the State agency.

States may also receive federal matching funds under Title IV-B

to provide child welfare services to children and their families regardless of their eligibility for other Federal programs. This program requires joint child welfare planning by the State and the Children's Bureau to assist State agencies in setting and meeting goals, providing coordinated child welfare services, improving the quality of their programs and ensuring that their systems provide protection to children in foster care.

States receive additional funds under Title IV-B if they include certain safeguards in their foster care system. These safeguards include an inventory of all children in foster care, an assessment of the appropriateness of their placement, a statewide information system of children in foster care, a case review system including case plans for each child, periodic reviews, dispositional hearings and service programs designed to prevent foster care placement and to reunify families if children are in placement.

Strengthening Troubled Families and Helping Them Stay Together.

When parents are unable to cope with problems such as illness, marital breakup, a runaway child, alcoholism, drug abuse and other personal or parenting problems, the children may be at risk of separation from their parents by placement into either temporary or long-term foster care. Current federal law requires that a State agency offer services to assist families before removing a child from his/her home. The Children's Bureau provides information to States, counties and cities in regard to the range of appropriate services. Findings from research and demonstration projects and State programs indicate that a community-wide system of family-based services is effective in strengthening families and preventing foster placement.

HEAD
Child Development Centers

The Head Start Bureau

Head Start was launched by the Federal Government in 1965 to help young children from low-income families get a better start in life. Head Start was designed to provide these children, primarily 3 to 5 years old, with a full program of educational, health, nutrition, and social services to meet their needs and enrich their lives.

Since its inception, Project Head Start has served more than 9 million children from low-income families. Today, some 449,000 children participate in Head Start programs each year—approximately 16 percent of the preschool children now living in poverty in this country.

In over 22,000 classrooms across the country, Head Start works to strengthen the ability of these children to cope with school and the world around them—and helps open up new opportunities for the youngsters and their families.

Nationally, Head Start is administered by the Head Start Bureau of ACYF. Locally, the activities of some 9,000 Head Start centers in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the U.S. Trust Territories are supervised by approximately 1,300 grantees—including Community Action Agencies, public school systems and other community-based organizations.

Grants are Awarded by the Health and Human Services Regional Offices to Provide Comprehensive Developmental Services to Preschool Children.

From the beginning, Head Start was designed to be more than an educational program. While Head Start children benefit from a variety of learning experiences that help lay the groundwork for success in elementary school, they receive much more:

(1) Hot meals each day to help meet their daily nutritional needs.

(2) A comprehensive health care program—including physical and dental examinations, immunizations, and follow-up on identified health problems.

(3) Mental health services to foster their emotional growth and help them deal with special problems.

(4) Social activities to help them learn to get along with others and gain in self-confidence.

Because parents are the most important influence on a child's development, Head Start places strong emphasis on involving parents in all phases of the program. Head Start parents serve on policy councils and committees and play an active role in the operation of local Head Start programs. They attend workshops on child care and on planning well-balanced meals at home. Many serve as paid or volunteer aides in Head Start classrooms.

The Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential

The Child Development Associate (CDA) program provides a national system for training, assessing and credentialing child care providers. Since its inception in 1971, the CDA program has represented a collaboration between the early childhood profession and the Department of Health and Human Services. The first CDA credential was awarded in July 1975. Within ten years, nearly 17,000 individuals earned a CDA credential, affecting nearly 750,000 young children and allowing one-quarter million parents to participate in the assessment of the teacher of their preschool age children. Fifty percent of the States have incorporated the CDA credential into their child care licensing requirements.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) through its Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition serves as the national CDA body with responsibility for administering the CDA program. The Council's major responsibilities are to develop and promulgate standards for training, assume assessment of candidates, and award the CDA credential to candidates who meet national standards for quality child care.

Training, assessment and the award of the CDA credential are based on the CDA Competency Standards which define the skill needed by center-based staff, home visitors, infant and toddler care givers and family day care providers. The CDA Competency Standards set the criteria for a caregiver's performance with children and their families.

CDA training is offered by a variety of institutions, including colleges, universities, and vocational schools. The Head Start Bureau funds grantees and delegate agencies to arrange and purchase CDA training from local institutions for their staff. The CDA Assessment System is based on the caregiver's ability to demonstrate the CDA Competencies while working with children, families and staff.

Meeting the Needs of Special Groups of Children and Families

In every local Head Start program, an effort is made to tailor activities to the individual requirements of each child. As part of this effort, many Head Start centers have adapted their programs to meet the needs of special groups of children and families:

(1) Children who have physical or emotional handicaps are placed with non-handicapped children in Head Start classrooms and participate in most daily activities, so that they can learn to relate to other children and function well in any situation. By law, ten percent of enrollment opportunities in each state must be made available to the handicapped.

(2) Children from Spanish-speaking families, who make up about 20 percent of all Head Start children, participate in programs that provide instruction in both English and Spanish and stress the cultural heritage of their families. Head Start has pioneered in developing bilingual-bicultural curricula for preschool children and new methods of training teachers to work with Spanish-speaking children.

(3) Children from American Indian and Migrant families take part in Head Start programs that meet their special needs. Head Start programs for American Indian children preserve their tribal traditions and encourage pride in the American Indian way of life. Children of migrant farm workers, whose families move from State to State, are served by a network of Head Start programs that help them adjust to a new environment while maintaining the language and culture of their families.

Research, Demonstration, and Training Activities

Building on knowledge gained through years of working with preschool children of low-income families and their parents, Head Start has launched a number of demonstration and training projects which have shown new ways to serve children and families and have been models for Head Start and other local early childhood programs. The training projects have provided technical assistance to Head Start centers and have helped to develop a new corps of professional child care workers.

Head Start has received considerable attention in recent years due to research findings documenting the program's lasting effect on children. Major studies found that children enrolled in Head Start and similar programs are far less likely to be held back a grade or assigned to special education classes than low-income children who did not attend an early childhood program. Long-term benefits of Head Start parallel or exceed those of other early intervention programs and document the cost-effectiveness of Head Start.

Head Start has served as a model for other public and private programs for preschool children and has helped millions of American children move ahead toward realizing their full potential.

Family and Youth Services Bureau

The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) is the newest organizational unit within the Administration for Children, Youth and Families. It combines the former Office of Families and the Youth Development Bureau. The two major objectives of the Bureau are to strengthen families and meet the needs of at-risk youth. One of the most important new activities of the Bureau is in the area of preventing youth suicide.

The Bureau's family activities fall into two groups: private sector response in developing innovative family support systems and increasing public awareness by providing information on techniques of positive family functioning.

The Bureau administers the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act as reauthorized under P.L. 98-473, Sections 650-657. This program was enacted in response to concern over the alarming number of youth who were leaving home without parental permission and were exposed to dangers while living on the streets.

The goals of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act are:

(1) to reunite youth with their families and to encourage the resolution of intrafamily problems;

(2) to strengthen family relationships and to encourage stable living conditions for youth;

(3) to meet the needs of youth during the runaway episode; and

(4) to help youth decide upon a future course of action.

Under the authority of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (ACT), the Family and Youth Services Bureau develops and strengthens the runaway shelter programs; funds and monitors the National Communications System; organizes and manages support networks of local shelters; funds and manages training and technical assistance for runaway shelters; and provides assistance to professionals, local organizations and governments to develop and implement programs affecting families.

The Act authorizes the funding of new and existing shelters and services for runaway youth through grants to States and local governments and for-profit and non-profit entities. In fiscal year 1984, 265 shelter programs were supported in the amount of $18.05 million.

As a result, approximately 70,200 youth and their families will receive services ranging from shelter care to counseling and follow-up services. The Act also provides for funding of a national communication system. The National Runaway Switchboard is a voluntary crisis intervention and referral service. The Switchboard in FY 1984 served over 250,000 youth and families. In 1985, the National Runaway Switchboard also became the National toll-free hotline for youth suicide.

The Bureau also develops areas of research, demonstration, and evaluation and recommends actions to address critical problems, in-

crease public awareness, and maximize utilization of project outcomes. In Fiscal Year 1985, $3.8 million were used to support strengthening the capacity of youth service providers to meet the needs of runaway and homeless youth. Topical areas of program development included:

(1) strengthening runaway shelter capacity to identify and provide emergency treatment to youths who are victims of physical and sexual abuse;

(2) addressing the problems of chronic runaways;

(3) strengthening runaway shelter staff capability to identify runaway and homeless youth at risk of suicide and provide emergency prevention services;

(4) job skills development models for older, homeless youth; and

(5) innovative strategies for providing independent living for older homeless youth.

In 1985 approximately $1.4 million ACYF/FYSB funds were spent on research and demonstration projects to strengthen the family.

Topical areas included:

(1) the family in the workplace - model support programs;

(2) strengthening family relationships of incarcerated parents;

(3) parenting skills and employability training for teenage parents; and

(4) parenting education in community college settings.

The Family and Youth Services Bureau works to develop greater public awareness about the value of the family in our society and the need to strengthen the family unit.

It encourages shelters and other youth services providers in their efforts to assist in problem resolution between youth and their families through greater emphasis on follow-up services after youth leave shelter care.

Finally, it works to expand and improve outreach and prevention efforts for youth.